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"There was a great buying of lace for the brides."—p. 213.

ESTHER WEST.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "PEGGY OGLIVIE'S INHERITANCE."

CHAPTER XXVIII.—SETTLED.

After spending several evenings in discussing the important question of "Where shall we go?" the Vaughans had at last decided in favour of a tour among the Flemish towns. It had often

been spoken of before, but always postponed for some more exciting campaign; yet Mr. Vaughan had long looked forward to visiting those quaint old cities thronged with histories of industry, art, and war.

For once, the choice of the little party had not been unanimous. Kate, who seemed to have been seized with the spirit of unrest, wanted to get away as far and as fast as possible; while Milly wished to remain as near home as she could: and as Kate had no reason—at least, no ostensible reason for desiring to rush away, and Milly had a very good one for desiring to be near at hand, the latter for once carried the day. She had gained over Constance by confiding to her that the grandest scenery would be lost upon her in Herbert's absence, and that the chief charm of any place to which she might be taken would consist in the frequency and regularity of its posts.

So they had started, by Ostend, for Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp; not to rush through them day by day, but to linger lovingly—at least, that was in Mr. Vaughan's programme—under the shadows of the great cathedrals, among the narrow streets with their many-gabled houses, and over the treasures of their galleries and churches.

But somehow or other this tour was not so pleasant as those that had gone before. The change was felt by all, and attributed by each to a different cause. Mr. Vaughan regretted that he had gratified his own taste in the matter, and carried his party into close, sultry towns, when they might have been breathing the exhilarating mountain air. Kate was always crying, "Come away." Her lack of interest was apparent; she who had formerly been the most eager to see everything that was to be seen, and learn everything that was to be learned, seemed to count it all a weariness. She, too, thought that it would have been otherwise if they had gone elsewhere, unconscious that the change was wholly in herself, and that if she had visited the scenes that had formerly delighted her, they would have delighted her no more than these. She did not know, for she was not one of those who look within, that she was like a child, in view of a new pleasure, who flings all its cherished toys aside as worthless until it is attained.

One little year had changed them all—or rather, it had made apparent the long, silent workings of inward change. Some tokens of the change Mr. Vaughan could see, and they saddened him in spite of himself. From Milly, the sweet, unabsorbed girlishness had departed. Her heart was no longer free. Besides, she had a new interest in shop-windows and decorations, and, alas for Mr. Vaughan, seemed to prefer such trivial matters to the great works of art, before which he stood enraptured.

As for Constance, who had usually catered for the whole company in respect of mirth and amusement, she kept to her rôle; but sometimes she did her part a little too laboriously, and failed to catch the sympathy of the others, as one fails who is acting instead of simply feeling and expressing the mood of the moment.

They had reached Antwerp, where they intended to remain the greater part of the week, and had

taken up their quarters in the Hotel St. Antoine. It was late in the evening when they arrived, and after a slight refreshment in the saloon, they had retired for the night. They retired early as a rule, and were stirring again proportionately soon on the morrow, knowing that there is no time like early morning for seeing these old towns in all their impressive beauty, or for visiting their great churches.

Constance was stirring first. She rose, and looked out of her window into the paved court surrounded by the hotel buildings. The soft, pure light fell upon the white walls. A number of doves were on the opposite roof, and from time to time they alighted in the spacious, empty courtyard, set round with tubs of evergreens. It was only five; but Constance dressed quickly, and went out without wakening the others. She knew that the great cathedral would be open early, and thither she was hastening to have an hour to herself, for she knew that her father and the others would follow her, as she had declared her intention the night before.

A good many people were abroad for such an early hour. As she crossed the market-place, and passed down the narrow streets which cluster at the foot of the great cathedral, women, in their black cloth cloaks and hoods, carrying baskets on their arms, bent their steps, like herself, to its gates, and, depositing their baskets in the porch, went in to worship. After wandering through the aisles, that stretch on either side like a forest of pillars, she seated herself amid the crowd, and remained there during the service. As she anticipated, her father had followed, but she had not noticed when he came in, nor did she notice him though he sat nearly opposite, engaged in reading the new expression of his daughter's face.

"I have hardly done her justice," he thought; "she does not take life so lightly as I imagined she did. I thought her wanting in depth because she sparkled on the surface. Her face is almost too grave and sad. How difficult it is to understand one's daughters."

When she rose from her seat he joined her, and they bargained for a look at the great pictures. Long after every one else had left the cathedral, father and daughter stood gazing on the face of the crucified Christ. It was not till they were outside the walls again that either ventured a remark, and then they walked most of the way in silence.

"I never could understand the rank which Rubens takes as a painter till now," said Constance. "I feel as if I could look for ever on that face; that, having once seen it, I shall see it always, only with a kind of thirst to see it with my eyes again to make the image of it clearer in my memory."

"We shall go again after breakfast with Kate and Milly," said her father, gratified by her enthusiasm: and with that they entered the arched gateway of the hotel.

A familiar voice was making inquiries of the porter, and receiving, it was evident, no very satisfactory replies.

It was Harry West. A fact which Constance perceived in a moment, while her father was advancing for a confirmatory view. With a quick gesture she drew him within the opposite doorway, and up a short flight of stairs. "He has not seen us," she whispered, with a little gasp.

Mr. Vaughan was decidedly slow. He simply looked astonished at his daughter's eagerness—astonished and questioning.

"That dreadful creature has come after us, papa," said Constance, with a half-comical perplexity. "Do you think it is possible to escape from him?"

It—the truth, that Harry had come after Kate—began to dawn upon Mr. Vaughan, and his face reflected the expression of his daughter's.

"But I don't see the necessity for escaping," he said. "We can keep him at a distance, surely."

"Oh, no; that's just what you can't do," replied Constance. "I am really vexed, papa."

The voice was heard drawing nearer. Was he going to take up his abode in the hotel? Constance dragged her father up another flight of steps, and along a passage which crossed the archway, into his own room. There they held a private consultation, in which Constance expressed her conviction that Kate was anxious to avoid Harry, and in which they concluded to keep their knowledge of his arrival to themselves in the meantime. If he had really come to stay there, of course it would be impossible to escape, as they took all their meals, according to custom, in the public room.

Leaving her father to himself, Constance next went off in search of her sisters. Their rooms were three narrow slips of apartments, next door to each other, and all looking into the paved court. First she peeped in upon Milly, who looked up from her letter, sweet and serene as usual. She was writing to Herbert. It passed her sister's comprehension how she found so much to say when she did so little. Constance gave her a good-morning kiss, and left her to her meditations. Then she looked into Kate's room, but that was empty, and with a feeling of almost apprehension, which she could not account for, she hastened back to Milly.

"I am sorry to disturb you again," she said, as her sister looked up once more from her task, "but I want to know where Kate is."

"She went out to meet you," said Milly, "for she asked me to go with her, but I wanted to finish my letter first. She has missed you, and gone on to the cathedral. Is anything the matter?" she added, catching an expression of annoyance on Constance's face.

"I am awfully hungry," said Constance, "and I will go and order breakfast. Come down as soon as you can, and bring papa with you. I dare say his letter will be finished before yours."

In the meantime Harry and Kate were walking happily, side by side, on their way to the cathedral. While Constance and her father were standing on the landing-place, Harry had simply crossed over, and walked into the saloon which Kate had entered before setting out on her walk; and if they had remained a moment longer, they might have heard the burst of congratulation with which he greeted her. As for Kate, she was conscious of a rush of pleasurable emotion, such as she had not felt since she left home: and she did not attempt to disguise it, but displayed it frankly, with a frankness which would have misled a sensitive man more than any amount of reserve. She kept back resolutely the little shyness which a consciousness that he had followed her stirred up. As for Harry, he was in a state of ecstatic gaiety. Kate, frankly pleased, was a very pleasant object to look at. He contrasted her, mentally, with Esther, and came quite honestly to the conclusion that he had never cared for the latter, that he had never cared for any one but Kate.

They went out together. Everything was new to Harry, and it was wonderful how Kate seemed to see with his eyes. The very things that had bored her the day before, were fresh and delightful now. They went to the cathedral, Kate expressing a hope that they might meet her father and Constance, which, of course, they did not, though they left no corner unvisited, conversing under the solemn arches till the second service began. She did not care to see a repetition of what she had witnessed earlier in the morning. Then they concluded that the others must have returned to the hotel.

But Harry's mind was full of the object of his journey, and under the excitement of the hour, he found it impossible to keep it to himself. On their way back, he had poured out his whole heart, all there was of it, to Kate—told her how he had missed her, and how he had followed her, and was ready to follow her over the whole world, for he loved but her alone. And to Kate, who had never had a lover, the declaration did not seem too abrupt; it seemed only the impassioned eagerness of love. Had he not a right to choose her and to love her, and was not she free to accept him? The little, silent assent was so easy. It was given in a moment, and Harry had a right to claim Kate Vaughan for his wife.

As they drew near the hotel, Kate became grave and thoughtful. What would her father say to this sudden settlement of the question of her future life?

But was not Harry richer, younger, handsomer than Milly's choice? He was satisfied with it; why should he not be satisfied with hers?

Mr. Vaughan and Milly had come down to breakfast. Their table was laid in a corner, with bread, and fruit, and eggs. The chocolate was cooling in the jug. Ample time had been allowed for Kate's return, and still they had to wait. Constance looked uneasy. Milly kept wondering at the delay. Mr.

Vaughan would have gone out in search of her, but that he had taught his girls a confidence in themselves, and a faith in his confidence in them, which he would have been sorry to infringe upon. He would have considered the constant watching and guarding to which some girls are subjected an insult to their sense and to their modesty.

At last Kate and Harry appeared together. Mr. Vaughan, who was looking that way, started as he saw them at the door of the saloon. But Harry came forward in his usual manner, exclaiming, "You did not expect to see me here, did you?" shaking hands warmly all round, and explaining rapidly how, though not why, he had come, having found out from Herbert Palmer the exact spot they were likely to be in on a given day. "Perhaps you will allow me to speak to you in private after breakfast," he said to Mr. Vaughan, loud enough for the rest to hear, however; and bringing a tide of blushes over Kate's face, which had before been paler than its wont.

"Oh, certainly," said Mr. Vaughan, rather stiffly. It was all that Constance could do to keep from laughing at her father's utter inability to administer a snub. Kate began to explain how she had gone in search of them, and to ask how it was that she had missed them; and Harry, in the meantime, coolly sat down beside her.

Constance noticed that her sister was painfully embarrassed, and came to the rescue by asking Mr. West to breakfast with them, devoutly wishing that he would go away instead. But he sat down quite at his ease, and for the time the meal lasted, he relieved the party of all further embarrassment by an incessant stream of talk.

Somehow it lasted a very short time indeed, every one making a rather hurried breakfast. Constance, who seemed to have taken the lead, rose first, and Kate and Milly followed, and went with her up-stairs. It was into Kate's room they went, and not a word was spoken till they had shut the door. Kate saw that her sisters waited for her to speak. She held out her hand to Milly. "I suppose you did not think I should be married almost as soon as you," she said.

"It is very sudden, is it not?" said Milly, gently, and with hesitation, but kissing her at the same time.

"Oh! Kate, it is not settled, surely?" cried Constance, impulsively.

"I am engaged to Harry West," she replied, in an offended tone, "and I think you are both very unkind to take it in this way."

"I was taken by surprise," said Milly. "Do not be vexed with me, Katie dear, I wish you all possible happiness."

"And neither of you are a bit sorry to leave poor papa," said Constance. But she too went up to her sister, and gravely wished her joy. Then she went into her own room, and stood at the window watching her father and Harry as they paced up and down

the court—her father with eyes bent upon the ground, listening to the young man at his side, who looked and spoke so eagerly. At length she saw the former somewhat reluctantly hold out his hand, and clasp that of Harry for some time, looking fixedly in his face as he spoke a few last words, and Harry seemed to wring the hand as if in thanks, to listen impatiently, and then to bound away. It was settled.

CHAPTER XXIX.

RECONSIDERED.

A LITTLE later, Kate was closeted with her father for half an hour, and she came out from the conference with the clearness in her face, as of the sky after a shower, which comes from recent, not too passionate tears. Mr. Vaughan had dealt very tenderly with his daughter, it was not in his nature to do otherwise, but he had earnestly urged her to reconsider her answer to Harry West. "I have given my consent," he said, "but only conditionally, and the condition is, that you do not ratify it till to-morrow. Mr. West acknowledges that he has been precipitate, and he has promised not to see you again to-day. You know that I have always taught you to consider yourselves free in this matter, and that I would not even influence your choice. All that I desire is, that you should not choose lightly in a matter of such moment. Remember, it is your whole life that is at stake. Be sure of yourself as well as of him. A change of mind may come too late. It is not too late now, Kate;" and with these words he suffered her to go.

It was not an easy task that had been imposed on her—this reconsideration. How was she to set about it? She could not prove that she did not love Harry. He was certainly attractive to her by outward qualities. She knew that she would not readily have accepted a poor man; yet she knew also that she had not accepted Harry because he was rich. But the highly fallacious test to which she brought herself again and again was the question, how she would bear her old home life if she went back from this opening into a new and ampler life? for this was the great attraction which marriage offered to her. She felt herself no longer a girl, and in truth she had reached the full bloom of womanhood. A daughter's place did not satisfy her strong individuality. She needed interests and pursuits of her own—a separate sphere to move in. This active nature of hers had been partly satisfied at the head of her father's household, but she felt that it could be so no longer. Milly's engagement had, perhaps, something to do in awakening the feeling of dissatisfaction which she had begun to feel with her life as it was: and this dissatisfaction was not wholly selfish in its root. Refined as it was, her life was after all one of self-seeking; and no human being can be satisfied with that, though

many only rush from one form of it to another, and know no other refuge.

Poor Kate became quite bewildered in her attempt at reconsideration; and the end of it was that when she bade her father good night, she signified that she had made up her mind in the affirmative—a fact which Mr. Vaughan conveyed to Harry that same evening.

On the morrow Kate wore her ring. It was the turquoise engagement-ring which had been bought for Esther. It had not suggested itself to him that as he had changed the lady, he might have changed the love-token.

As yet Esther's name had not been mentioned, but now Constance ventured to ask Harry how he had left her, and their old friend Mrs. West. Something very like a cloud of resentment lowered on his face, as he told them that Esther had refused to return, had elected to stay among her own people, "a wretched set, by the place they live in," he added; "but I suppose she has a natural taste for that sort of thing."

"She has a natural taste for whatever is most noble and unselfish," flashed out Constance, and she would have quarrelled with her brother-in-law elect there and then, but for a look of reproof from her father. Constance felt sure that Esther had rejected Harry, from that moment, though he had assured Kate that he had never asked her, which was verbally true.

The small amount of interest with which the tour had commenced had completely evaporated, and all felt that the sooner it was over the better;—all but Harry and Kate, who seemed to enjoy everything, and to become more and more radiant with satisfaction—so much so that Mr. Vaughan became reconciled to his new son-in-law, though no two people could well have less in common. "They love each other," he thought, "and that is enough." They might be like two bright rivers flowing together over the sparkling shallows; the channel of their lives would widen and deepen by-and-by.

But Constance observed more closely, and was not satisfied. It seemed to her that Kate was too much occupied with the accessories of her position. That there were too many discussions about where and how they were to live, what they were to do, and where they were to go. The pleasure-loving element in Kate was showing itself under Harry's fostering treatment, and there were better things in her, as her sister knew.

At Brussels there was a great buying of lace for the brides, for they had settled to be married on the same day, Mr. Vaughan giving Milly a veil of the same cost as that which Harry bought for Kate: and Constance could not help noticing that though extravagant and lavish, Harry expended chiefly on himself, and had an inward grudge when the extravagance was for another. Kate, she knew, with

all her faults, was generous as the day, and she feared accordingly for her sister's future. Other people's futures are so much clearer to us than our own. Kate had no shadow of apprehension.

Kate and Harry caused the party to linger at Brussels longer than they would otherwise have done. Constance was vehement in her animadversions on the place. "It is neither beautiful nor interesting," she said. "Its gaieties have all the effect of dulness upon me. I wonder why there is always a *fête* in Brussels. The people seem to have nothing better to do. I do dislike people who have nothing to do but to amuse themselves!"

At which severe sally Kate and Harry only laughed, without in the least applying the latter portion of it to themselves. It did not occur to these two, at this time to think what they were going to do with their lives, that is, what use they were to make of them. They only thought what highest kind and amount of pleasure they could get out of them;—and, indeed, not what highest kind, but only what highest sensuous kind of gratification they could reach.

And it is easy to under-rate the difficulty of a higher standard of life to a man in Harry's position: it can hardly be over estimated. He was a rich man without any depth of culture to awaken the higher intellectual needs—such as the need of a political or social career. His father had realised a large fortune, partly by sheep-farming, partly by trading, and had left him a noble independence, but had neglected to train him to its uses. The only career which he had open to him, was to follow in his father's steps and make a still larger fortune; and to this there was nothing to urge him. Organised as his resources were, money seemed to make money without much help of his. Then he was amazingly clever at everything he undertook, and it acted as a barrier to his undertaking anything in particular.

He had grown up with no particular fitness for anything, and what is worse, with no particular devotion to anything. Science, art, letters, require sacrifice from their votaries, and there was no motive to urge Harry to sacrifice to any of them. Perfection, mastership, in anything demands hard service, and there was nothing to tempt him to serve. The nature must be noble indeed which can bear the withdrawal of all outward stimulus, and yet exert its highest powers. Certainly Harry West had not such a nature: and therefore he was what Constance called him, a do-nothing; and a do-nothing he would remain, unless some great discontent drove him to do a man's work in the world.

About the end of September the party reached home. Herbert Palmer running down to Dover to meet them, and the first news that greeted them was that of the death of Mrs. West. She was not only dead but buried, for Harry had not thought it

necessary to tell Mrs. West whither he had gone; all that she or Esther knew was that he had gone abroad for a week or two. Therefore the lawyer had taken possession of her effects in his absence, the servants had been dismissed, and Esther, after watching by her till all was over, had returned to her mother, not much richer in anything, save culture and refinement, than if she had never been away.

The lawyer had explained to her that nearly five thousand pounds had been invested for her benefit in the shares of a northern bank. It was possible that something might be saved, but at present the affairs of the bank had gone to wreck, and would take months, if not years, to wind up. Happily the bulk of Mrs. West's property, accruing at her death

to Mr. Henry West, was perfectly secure. It was the simple lady's own investments that had failed—the lawyer adding that she had been ill advised.

Harry West had come into other two thousand a-year, and over his happiness the death of his relative cast a very faint shadow indeed. Mr. Vaughan and Constance, and Kate herself, held that it would be necessary to postpone their marriage; but Harry diplomatically yielding an inch, gained an ell in the long run, and it was finally arranged that the double marriage should take place at the end of October, instead of the beginning, with the understanding that it should be celebrated with the utmost quietness.

(To be continued.)

THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH.

A HOMILY FOR THE CLOSING YEAR. BY THE REV. T. M. MORRIS, IPSWICH.

NE likes to travel back in thought to these old-world times. It is pleasant, in the remembrance that we are "brethren of a common lot," and children of a common Father, to forget the interval of nearly three thousand years which rolls between, and to feel that we can claim kindred with men and women, who in some respects seem so immeasurably remote, in others so wonderfully near. Indeed, the pictures of human life we occasionally meet with in these ancient Scriptures, have such an air of reality, that we can scarcely persuade ourselves that we are separated from the persons and scenes described by so broad an interval of time. But, however difficult to realise, so it is! The events which are presented to us with such brief and beautiful simplicity in this passage of sacred Scripture, and which seem as real and almost as recent as some in our own lives, happened long, long ago—before the blind Singer of Chios gave us his rhythmical legends, and the Father of History his more definite records.

We have here a picture of human life in a period so far removed from us, that we should have known nothing of it but for the occasional glimpses we obtain in the pages of inspired history. And while we have great reason to prize the Bible on other and higher accounts, we should be very grateful to God for thus linking together the ages, and penetrating, if it be only with a single stream of light, the otherwise absolute obscurity of that remote time.

It is a very pleasant thing to know that three thousand years since the earth was trodden by men and women, and little children, who, as to all the great feelings and impulses of humanity, were such as now tread the earth; and that then those profounder emotions were in full play, which still

with their "ceaseless surge" are everywhere swaying human life. It is pleasant for us to learn that the Great Father was exercising the same wise, watchful, minute, and loving providence, of which we are too often the unconscious and ungrateful objects—to find, in short, in the humble home, the widow's cottage at Zarephath, human nature and divine providence, earthly need and heavenly help, very much as to all essentials as we may see them in many an English home in this the nineteenth century after Christ.

Many are the pleasant and profitable thoughts which well up within us as we read this brief narrative, which, with its simple beauty must charm, and, with its pathos and tenderness, must melt the heart of the most careless reader. And let us not forget, as we read, that in all such passages as this, wrapped up in the facts of remote history, there is some lesson of practical wisdom for us—for all—which God would have us learn. All these things "are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." Let us see, then, whether there are not certain aspects of divine providence suggested by this little episode, which are worthy of attention.

The present portion of Old Testament history has many charms for us. It makes a very strong and direct appeal to the imagination and the heart. The portraiture of Elijah is one around which gather some of our earliest and brightest memories. And that life which we wondered over, with child-like wonderment, as we saw it so strangely sustained at the house of Zarephath, and by the brook Cherith, we look at with scarcely less astonishment now. Indeed, it is one of those unfathomable lives, which awaken profounder wonder and admiration the longer and more intently we contemplate them.

We have this stern, strong, mysteriously-man-

ted man, whose antecedents are so impenetrably obscure, flashing upon us at once as the messenger and representative of a justly-offended God; and then we see him—his work accomplished—yet more strangely take his departure, with fire-chariot and horses, leaving, as the alone visible memorial of his life, that wonder-working mantle, which invested Elisha with not inferior powers.

From solitude and obscurity this remarkable man steps forth at once upon the stage of public life, thoroughly equipped by God for the part he was to play. We see him forcing his way into the chamber of royalty—taking his stand at the foot of Ahab's throne; and there he utters, in the audience of the trembling and enraged monarch, these words of doom: "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." And from that moment the heavens were as brass, and the fearful plague of drought, and consequently of famine, was realised in all its intensity.

But the man of God who pronounces this doom is to be himself exempted from it. He finds himself encircled by the divine power and love of Him whom he serves. He finds, according to the word of God, a refuge from the malignity of men by the brook Cherith, and there, drinking of the brook, which with ever-lessening volume and subsiding murmur ran by, his wants are supplied by the most voracious of birds, the ravens bringing him his morning and evening meal. In consequence of the long-continued drought, the waters of the brook at length dry up; but while these earthly waters fail, God's compassions fail not, his care for his servant does not cease.

He is now sent beyond the borders of Israel into Sidon, to the heathen city or village of Zarephath, and to the house of a poor widow. And we find our Saviour (Luke iv. 26) referring to this fact as prefiguring the intended extension of God's mercy to the Gentiles.

The dealings of God with his servant at this period are in many respects very remarkable. We see how God, by the same providential arrangement, secures the well-being of his servant Elijah, and carries an unexpected blessing to the house of the poor widow of Zarephath. And how wonderful is this arrangement! We see one person, absolutely destitute, thrown for support on another who is equally destitute.

We see the prophet, according to God's word, passing away from the now dry watercourse of the brook Cherith, from the rocks which have long sheltered him, and from the haunts of the ravens which have so long fed him. He is worn out with fatigue and hunger, dispirited on account of the apparent fruitlessness of his mission, and sorrowing because of the sorrows and sins of God's

people. Thus wearied and discouraged, he draws near to Zarephath, and in the vicinity of the city he sees a poor widow-woman picking up a few sticks, that she might go home and dress a handful of meal that yet remains in her barrel for herself and her only child, and then resign herself and her son to the now apparently inevitable doom of starvation.

Here, then, we have the persecuted prophet and the starving widow at the city's gate. Elijah—perhaps by some prophetic instinct—recognises her as the woman to whom he is sent, and he addresses himself to her in such a way as to test both her faith and her benevolence.

He first asks for water in a land of drought, where every drop of water is precious; and the woman, without any question or hesitancy, sets out to secure for the famished man that which shall relieve his thirst. The second request involved even a greater trial of faith; for, as the woman was going to fetch the water, the prophet calls to her, saying: "Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said: As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse; and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not: go, and do as thou hast said; but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

God has a great honour and a great blessing in store for this poor woman that she wots not of. But God tries her faith ere he bestows the blessing. How easily might this woman have excused herself from doing anything for the prophet. How easily might she have pleaded her poverty, and the utter extremity of her need. God means to bless her; but how little like a blessing does it look, to ask her to share her last meal with a stranger? But this was God's way, and it was the best. She received a prophet in the name of a prophet, and she received a prophet's reward. Long years after would she and her son recall that strange meeting by the city gate, the request of the prophet, the fulfilment of God's word in their continued support through all that terrible time of drought and famine, and how, with almost incredulous wonder, they went again, and again, and again to the barrel and the cruse, and always found meal in the one and oil in the other. In those later times many must have looked with astonishment on those carefully-preserved relics—the barrel and the cruse, and, better memorial than all beside, the living son—who was dead, but is alive again—

spared by the mercy and power of God to be the comfort and support of his widowed mother.

How wonderful is this picture! Here have we two helpless ones, mutually helpful, because God over all is constantly helping them both.

But while it is very pleasant for us to dwell in thought upon the goodness of God so wonderfully displayed long, long ago, and the gratitude of this poor widow and her son, it is well for us to inquire if we are not called to celebrate that same tender providence of God which was illustrated in the widow's home in Zarephath.

Here, then, we have three important principles brought out. This poor woman was blessed, according to God's promise, according to *her need*, and according to *her use* in God's service of the blessings conferred.

Have not we to celebrate the same providence? Setting aside the miraculous circumstances, do not corresponding facts awaken our gratitude? Can we not all bear witness this day that God has blessed us according to his *word*—his *promise*? Can we not testify that the Lord has not failed in reference to any one thing which he has spoken concerning us? God's promise, so far as earthly good is concerned is a very limited one. We are told that our bread and water shall not fail, that the necessaries of life shall be continued to us. What have been the facts of the case? We have been providentially blessed, in many different degrees, but even the poorest has received at God's hand much more than the bare necessities of life, much to adorn and beautify it, to make it a pleasant and desirable thing to live. We are overwhelmed with a sense of their number and magnitude, the moment we try to enumerate the providential mercies of God received during the past year. Think of those common mercies, as we call them, which are the most needful ones—the health and strength which we have enjoyed, our freedom, or comparative freedom, from sickness and pain, or, if there have been times of sorrow and painfulness, and loss, how has the goodness of the Lord been made known even in such seasons as these! Though differing in many respects, all who read this paper will agree at least in this—that they are bound to rear a memorial of God's unfailing help hitherto enjoyed, and of innumerable benefits which have been bountifully bestowed.

The blessing has been, not only according to God's promise, but correspondent with our *need*. It was so with the widow of Zarephath. The oil in the cruse and the meal in the barrel continued according to the word of the Lord, and was sufficient for the daily wants of that small household. So has it been thus far with us. God's supplies have ever corresponded with our exigencies. Visibly, there was nothing but a little oil and a little meal between the widow's family and utter

want, even absolute starvation; but it was enough. With many of us it may be outwardly different, with all it is essentially the same. We are just as dependent upon God as she was, some more, some less obviously so. How many are there who live literally "from hand to mouth," that is, they live on what they earn from day to day; the meal in the barrel and the oil in the cruse depend upon the continuance of health and strength, the continuance of employment, which in many different ways may be suddenly and unexpectedly interfered with. And now at the year's close we are able to give thanks unto God that our necessities have been met; the meal in the barrel, the oil in the cruse have not failed. With many, life is one long-continued hand-to-hand struggle with poverty, the intensity and hardship of which those who are more favourably circumstanced can but faintly imagine. There have been many of God's people during the past year who have, in this England of ours, been well-nigh as narrowly straitened as this poor widow, who have more than once come to their last meal, and who have often painfully wondered where the children's food and clothes should come from; and yet how many are there able this day to testify that the blessing has never failed. The blessing has been according to need rather than desire, and God's discernment of that need rather than their sense of it.

And with those of us who have been more richly endowed with worldly goods, how wonderfully have God's supplies met our wants. How often have we looked into the future and said within ourselves, How shall we surmount this difficulty or that? what should we do if such and such things were to happen to us? But we have ever found God present with his help; have ever found, as did the poor widow of Zarephath, the help of God exactly correspondent with our need.

God's blessing is according to our *use* of it. It was so with this poor widow. "Never," says Bishop Hall, "did the corn and olive so increase in the growing as did these in the using." We have here a principle of universal application. The meal and oil increased in connection with their free and bountiful use. The fish and bread, with which the hungry multitude were satisfied, mysteriously multiplied during the very act of distribution and consumption. And so is it in everything. Our bodily strength increases with a free and full use of our bodily powers; and just so is it with our mental faculties; they soon lose their vigour and elasticity if we suffer them to "rust in us unused." And so with God's providential bestowments: "There is a giving which yet increaseth, and there is a withholding more than is meet, that tendeth to poverty;" not always poverty in the literal sense of the word, but that which is far worse, poverty of soul. There may be the



(Drawn by W. JONES.)

"Tasks performed for the sake of Annette's love are easy."—p. 220.

niggardly, the avaricious holding back of more than is meet, and there is no retribution which attracts the attention of men, but there is, notwithstanding, a retributive agency secretly at work. The soul is growing poorer in the midst of earthly riches, losing its powers of enjoyment as the material means of enjoyment multiply; there is increase in basket and in store, but both the meal in the barrel and the oil in the cruse have lost their pleasant taste. There are few people more miserable than those who selfishly live for themselves, whose thoughts and sympathies and beneficence rarely pass beyond that narrow circle of which they are the centre.

Let us examine ourselves in reference to this. God has manifested towards us an unfailing beneficence; what have we done, involving sacrifice of thought, or time, or money towards blessing others; to what extent have we felt it to be our duty and privilege to do good and to communicate? Let us not forget that we are but the stewards of God, and must one day give in our account.

We see the same principles illustrated in God's gracious dealings with us. Here, too, he blesses us according to his promise, our need, and our use of the blessings bestowed.

We have been blessed according to the Lord's promise. While the absolute promises of God in reference to material and present bestowments are few and limited, the promises which relate to the maintenance and enrichment of spiritual life are exceeding great and precious; and yet, many and great as they are, do we not feel that they have found abundant fulfilment in our experience? We may have come short of them in our unbelief; we may have suffered loss because we have not asked, or have in some way asked amiss, but in no case can we reproach God with unfaithfulness or forgetfulness.

God ministers grace to his people, not only according to his promise, but also according to their need. He giveth grace to all, but differently to different persons—differently to the same

person at different times, and in different circumstances. God giveth us "grace for grace"—one grace instead of another, according to our need. What we need to-day we receive to-day, and if we need anything else to-morrow, we shall have that also. Grace to live while life lasts, and grace for dying when death comes. Have we not found this to be the case? Are we not able to testify to this fact? How many and varied have been our spiritual necessities, and in all God has appeared for us, preventing us with his goodness, sustaining us with his grace; and in every exigency we have found that grace sufficient.

God bestows grace upon us, according to the use to which we put benefits conferred. For the due maintenance of spiritual as well as physical health, there must be a certain proportion, a certain correspondence between what we receive and what we expend; there must be, with a sufficiency of food, a sufficiency of exercise. Who are the healthy, vigorous Christians—who are they who have a real enjoyment of Christian life, who can take the cup of salvation into their hands and bless the name of the Lord? They are, without exception, or with only such exceptions as prove the rule, those who are doing something for the glory of Christ and the good of their fellow-men, which is fairly proportioned to their powers and their position. Who, on the other hand, are the querulous, dyspeptic Christians, miserable in themselves and a source of misery to others? They are those whose spiritual activities exclusively centre in themselves, whose spiritual desires terminate in their own enjoyment, in their own salvation, whose chief occupation is the study of their own morbid symptoms, who are concerned for their own good to the exclusion or neglect of the good of others. Such never can thrive while this state of things continues. Let such—let all lay to heart the lesson taught us by God's dealings with the widow of Zarephath: that the blessing of the Lord is bestowed according to his promise, according to our need, and according to our use of the blessing communicated.

THE DWARF ON THE GIANT'S SHOULDERS.

"Dwarfs on giants' shoulders see more than the giants themselves."—Proverb.

CHAPTER I.


HERE was darkness in the city—darkness over the broad river Elbe, which flowed by its walls; darkness in the street, where the busy feet of the working folk had so lately hurried to and fro, and rest was given to the active brains and the toiling hands, for the night had come, "when no man could work."

But even then, when the deep-toned clocks had

sounded the first hour of the approaching day through the silent streets; when the watchman's monotonous voice had said that every one was asleep, and that "all was well," there were two men who had no thought of sleeping. They were together in the gabled room of a quaint house in the heart of the city, and their faces were anxious, and the hands which turned over the papers with which the table was bestrewn, were restless and eager.

"It was here, Gaspard; my hand was on it not many minutes ago," said the elder of the two.

"Then it cannot be far off, Master Rudolf," rejoined the other, a little, sharp-faced man, whose eyes twinkled with cunning.

"Ah! let us search for it, my son. A life-time of labour is recorded on that paper. It contains the results of my calculations concerning my great discovery. It is not quite completed yet, Gaspard. What a day will that be when I gain the last link in the chain, and proclaim it to the world!"

"Truly, it will," answered Gaspard; and he hid his hand under his velvet mantle, and pressed something that was concealed amongst its folds more closely to his heart.

"Only one link wanted, Gaspard — only *one* link, and the work of a long life is completed; I shall have given to science that which it has so much needed. I shall not have lived in vain. But where *is* this paper? I am lost if I cannot find it. Gaspard, to you alone have I told all that is in my heart: you alone know the value of these calculations; aid me in my search, for the sake of pity."

"I have searched diligently, though I hardly know which of your papers you are looking for, good master; but were it not better now to wait till the morning light, when we shall assuredly find it. I will come with the first streak of dawn, to aid you, for, as you say, a paper so valuable must not be lost."

"Ah! it may be so; young frames need rest. For us who are old, we can wait—we can wait; we shall rest long enough very soon," said the old astronomer, wearily. "Away with you to your slumbers, my Gaspard; return with the morning to me. God grant it may be to rejoice with me over that which I have found."

Gaspard, hastening to avail himself of the old man's permission, stealthily left the room and hurried down the staircase to the street below. He threaded his way through the darkest alleys, until he reached his home, only pausing once before a wayside shrine, where a small lamp was burning. It was not for devotion that Gaspard stopped, it was but to draw forth a hidden paper, and to scan it with greedy eyes; then to smile malignantly as he refolded it, saying between his teeth, "Ah, ha! Master Rudolf, *only one link* wanted—*only one*. But I have got it, and you have not; yours is the work, and mine the gain; yours the years of labour, and mine the discovery; yours the toil, and mine the triumph. And when I am raised to rank, and power, and fame, will not your proud daughter be sorry that she despised Gaspard Delanoir, because he was 'small, and of no reputation,' because he had not the giant mind of her great father, or the handsome face of Heinrich Dorff?" Yet even now and then, for

a moment, the cunning, scornful sneer went away from his face. "I would gladly give back this paper to win one smile from her. Annette, Annette, no one will ever love you as I love you. To-morrow I will put your father's fate into your hands—to-morrow I will give you a chance of revoking that cruel answer which you gave me. Even yet you may be mine."

CHAPTER II.

THE morning sunshine was streaming in brightly through the gabled windows of the old house. It threw a bright ray across the silver hair of the old astronomer as his head was still bent over the table in the anxious search; it touched his broad, rugged forehead, which seemed to be even more deeply lined and furrowed than it had been the night before, so quickly had anxiety told upon him; it fell upon the thin, trembling fingers which were toiling in vain.

"I wonder Gaspard is not here," he muttered, as the warm sunshine on his hands told him how far the morning had advanced. "But the search is useless, is useless. I must begin again, I must go all over the work of years. God in heaven spare me life and strength to do it. Gaspard will help me—he knows all—I feel sure he will. There is my Annette singing like a bird. She will grieve over my loss as a child might do—she will not understand its magnitude. But I must to my work, for my life draws towards evening, and it must be done before the nightfall."

Into the adjoining room the sun shone also, only its rays fell not on musty papers and a troubled, old face, but on a polished wooden floor, on a table spread for the morning meal, and lingered most lovingly of all round the beautiful Annette, following her wherever she went, so that all the room seemed brighter because she was in it.

She was singing to herself as she spread the table—singing with that sweet bird-like voice which had even reached the ears of the old man at his work. It had also reached the ears of Gaspard Delanoir, as he paused on the threshold of the room, and caused him to stand in the shadow, listening to the pleasant sound.

For a moment or two Annette sang on unconsciously, then some slight noise caused her to turn round, and the song stopped abruptly.

"Good morning, Monsieur Delanoir," she said from where she stood, "you are early to-day; is there any news stirring?"

"None that I know of! I came to see if I could help your father."

"I do not think he has risen; he generally comes to have his breakfast before this time."

"I should hardly think he has slept; he lost a paper of much value last night, and he has been searching for it. I came to help him."

"You are kind," said Annette, turning her beautiful face upon him for the first time.

He advanced a step or two nearer, and lowered his voice as he said, "Tasks performed for the sake of Annette's love are easy," and he stretched out his hand to take hers; but Annette drew back quickly, and said, firmly—

"Why be ever recurring to this subject, Monsieur Gaspard; have I not told you that it can never, never be as you would have it?"

"And why not?" asked Gaspard, testily. "Because, forsooth, you love another, and that other, Heinrich Dorft, loves you not. Are you not ashamed?"

"It is no shame to love that which is far nobler and better than oneself," said Annette, coldly. She was too proud to tell Gaspard of her full trust in Heinrich's love for her, but her blue eyes flashed on him, as she impatiently pushed back her yellow hair with a gesture which was peculiar to her when she was angry.

Gaspard bit his thin lip, and felt that he was not making progress.

"The loss of that paper is a serious one to your father; it is the result of many years' work. I can help him to do the work far quicker than he can do it unaided."

"My poor father," said Annette; "I am sure he will count upon your help, he has made a friend of you."

"I could write down for him all that he has lost, in the space of a few days."

"And you will?" said Annette, with sudden pleading. "At his age, his health will not bear too much study."

"I will, on one condition, and you know it already," said Gaspard, slowly.

But Annette replied, "I have already given you my answer, and I can never give you any other."

"Then I leave this place to-day, and you will see your father perishing for lack of the help which I could have given him. *Adieu.*" The sinister look on his face deepened and darkened as he turned away, but he paused again on the threshold. "As I came here, I saw Heinrich Dorft pacing beneath the linden-trees, and there walked with him a girl as young and as beautiful as you are. Have you a message for him?"

"If I had, I would send it by some more fitting messenger than Monsieur Delanoir." But as she turned away her head, she smiled to herself at the malignant spite of this contemptible suitor: for, on the previous day, had not Heinrich told her that he took his blind sister out into the sunshine beneath the linden-trees before his day's work began?—had he not said how he longed for Annette to know and to love this same sister of his?

The smile brightened and lingered tenderly on her face for a moment, as she thought of her lover;

then it decayed to a look of sorrowful anxiety as she listened to the voices in her father's room above. Not many words were spoken—a few hot and bitter ones by Gaspard, a few at first of entreaty by the astronomer—then some of scornful mockery, and a calm, stern rejoinder. Nothing more, except a quick step descending the steep, narrow staircase, and a groan, which made Annette hasten up to her father.

Master Rudolf was surrounded with parchments and papers, for he had already begun to gather the materials for doing his work again. He did not turn his head until Annette knelt by his side, and laid her hand upon his shoulder; then he said, wearily, "You have heard of my misfortune, my daughter?"

She only answered by kissing him.

"Gaspard, who alone could help me, has refused to do so."

"I know all," she said, softly. "You would not have had me fulfil his dastardly condition?"

"Never!" answered the old man, firmly. "To wrong one human heart is a crime which the deepest knowledge and the highest discovery could never cancel. But I must to my work now; I have much to do, my child, and a short time—but a very short time to do it."

"You must have food and rest, my father, or you will never be able for it. Come, now, everything is ready."

"I will come soon," he said, drawing his papers to him as he spoke.

Annette went away and prepared breakfast. She waited for her father for some time, but he did not come. She called aloud, "Father;" he did not answer her. Then she went to him, and found some figures traced upon the page before him; but the hand which had traced them had fallen powerless by the old man's side. His head had sunk upon his breast, and he was insensible.

The darkness had overtaken him sooner than he had expected. His day was done; and there was nothing left for him but to creep home wearily and painfully, for the night had come when he could not work.

CHAPTER III.

It was some months later, and in the gabled room Rudolf the astronomer lay dying. He had lingered longer than Annette had dared to hope he could; but the great mind, though incapable of work, was stronger than the enfeebled body, and had a tenacious hold upon the interests of life. Annette sat by his side at her work, every now and then pausing to stoop her head and catch the low, broken words which he said. "My child, it was the work of a life"—and she knew then that he was speaking of the discovery which had failed—"it was the dream of many a year to see it com-

pleted, and now all is lost. Well, the Great Master's will must be done. If I have nothing but a life's failure to lay at his feet, he knows all, and he knows wherefore it is so."

"Oh, father! and it was so nearly done," said Annette, with that tender and unwearying sympathy which it is ever a woman's right to give to those she loves. "It wanted very little of being completed, did it not?"

"Ay, my child, but a little. There was only one point which I had not made quite clear—but one."

"I sometimes wish that you had explained it all to Heinrich, instead of doing so to Gaspard Delanoir, dear father; perhaps that one clear thought might have come to him, and your discovery might have been completed long ago, before the paper was lost," and Annette coloured proudly as she spoke of her lover.

"Ay, it might have been better; but Gaspard was much with me. I have told him all. His mind is not original, but it is receptive. If he ever completes the discovery he will give it to the world, and my name will not be forgotten; but a lifetime's thought is a sad loss, my daughter."

"Yes, truly; but no great life can be lost, my father; Heinrich says so. Ah! here he comes to say it to you himself."

A young burgher of the city entered the room at this moment, and one glance at his noble face told that he was worthy of Annette's love; but it was a face full of stern sorrow just now, and though it softened as he spoke to Annette, there was trouble in his voice.

"What am I to say?" he asked, gravely.

"My father is grieving over the discovery, as usual, and— But what is it, Heinrich?—what does that sad, grave look mean?"

"The discovery is completed. It was given to the world yesterday."

"What?" cried the old man, with sudden joy—"has the paper been found? Why was I not told? Are they glad? Is the city proud?"

"It is proud of the blackest hypocrite that ever breathed—of Gaspard Delanoir," answered Heinrich, fiercely. "He has got the link which you needed. He has possessed himself of your calculations. The city is ringing with his fame at this moment."

"Oh! hush, hush, Heinrich, it will kill my father," said Annette. "The false traitor!" and she covered her face and sobbed, while Heinrich with difficulty checked the tide of his anger, which flowed out in bitter invectives.

Only the old man was calm. Over his face there came first a sharp spasm of pain, then a look of peace, then a triumphant smile.

"Children," he whispered, "it is well. I have lived my life. I have worked the work which God gave me. It was bitter a while ago to think that it was all a failure; but the discovery is made. The world will be the better that I have lived, though it may never know my name. I have no wealth to leave you, my dear ones," and his voice grew feebler and fainter; "but I give you to each other." He joined their hands, and smiling, shut his eyes on this life for ever.

Years afterwards, by careful search and patient examination, Heinrich Dorft proved to the world that it was to Rudolf, and not to the false Gaspard, that the discovery was owing—to Rudolf, who had lived and died unhonoured, save by the few who knew his worth. But then it was too late for fame, or honour, or this world's good to touch him. He needed it not, for he was being satisfied with the deeper knowledge and the truer gain.

SELF-EXAMINATION.

BY THE REV. J. B. OWEN, M.A., VICAR OF ST. JUDE'S, CHELSEA.

EAR readers of THE QUIVER, David advises you to adopt a practice of which many of his psalms are very sweet and precious examples—viz., to "commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." Get rid of the world—get by yourself, and if you have no other opportunity of retirement for self-inquisition, do it in your chamber—steal an hour from sleep. Search yourself thoroughly, honestly, and humbly, "without partiality and without hypocrisy." The habit operates on the inner life, just as the daily balancing of a cash account tells on your business, by securing regularity and ascertaining progress, or otherwise shortcomings. Every metaphor in

Scripture descriptive of a believer's course, implies the duty and necessity of self-examination.

In the Great Pyramid is a huge coffer of hewn stone, which for ages was supposed to be the sarcophagus of an ancient Egyptian king. Modern research has demonstrated the greater probability of its having been the standard corn-meter, according to whose proportions the measures of all kinds of grain were gauged and calculated among the Egyptians. "The balance of the sanctuary," by which the life-courses of a believer are weighed, is no dead letter, but a real, authentic, spiritual gauge, by which the disciple tests and "examines himself, whether he be in the faith," and "proves his own self"—whether Christ be in him of a

truth, and whether he can truly say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." By the teaching of the Holy Spirit, it would always help us to a godlier and happier morrow, if every night we subjected to some such inquiries as we proceed to suggest, the life and conversation of the past day. They are thrown into their metrical shape, for the sake of brevity, and perhaps of easier remembrance. May the Spirit of grace sanctify the personal catechism to some young brother's or sister's heart!

A FORM OF SELF-EXAMINATION.

HAVE I to-day, through gain or loss,
Taken up my daily cross?
In sullen or ingenuous mood,
All earthly of the earth subdued?
Did I to others honestly
As I would have them do to me?
What carnal lust, or creature pride,
Have I, through mercy, mortified?
What graven vanity or whim
Have I denied myself for Him,
Who on the steep of Calvary
Crucified himself for me?
Of all the hours to this world given
Was there "one hour" spent for heaven?
Have I the Tempter tempted by
My own unchecked inconstancy?
Grown the blade into the ear,
Predictive of a fruitful year?
Is "strength to strength" and "grace for grace"
The index of my daily pace?
Hath any quarrel crossed my path,
And "let the sun down on my wrath,"
Darkening my spirit chafed,
Without a plea for peace vouchsafed?
Dare I in my conscience pray,
"Forgive, as I forgave" to-day?
Of truant thoughts that strayed abroad,
How many wandered back to God,
Like Noah's dove that flapped the main,
But found no rest till home again?
Were the poor to-day befriended?
Any "brother weak offended?"
Or have my fellow-sinners seen
One who hath with Jesus been?
Hath his spirit fused in mine
The flame of mysteries divine?
Have I realised His Word,
"In me revealing Christ the Lord?"
Do I from day to day abhor
Myself and sin yet more and more?
And deep as the unsearchable
Depths of evil—deeper still
Do I mourn the guilt and pain

That "crucified my Lord again,"
And penitently breathe His name
Whom I had "put to open shame?"
Did the cold world's freezing air
Petrify my knees in prayer,
Like a dumb marble worshipper?
Or did my sacrifice betimes,
Offered with the matin chimes,
Like kindled frankincense arise
To seek its focus in the skies?
Am "alien from my mother's womb,"
Hastening to the Saviour's tomb,
To bury every doubt and fear
Where angels whispered, "He's not here!"
Am I, quickened by His word,
Risen with my living Lord?
"Stranger and pilgrim" do I run,
Though faint as Cephas after John,
When seeking both the sepulchre,
Love outstripped the flight of fear?
"A soldier," have I stood my ground,
In spite of many a fall and wound,
Contending in the name and faith
Of Him who conquered by His death?
"A racer," with his glorious prize
Of starry coronal in the skies,
Do I so run, and wrestle too,
As if I caught the prize in view?
And flesh and feeling mortify
As they who strive for mastery?
Do I press towards the goal,
Myself—mine inner man—my soul—
A thing of life—a heavenly breath,
Surviving its own dust and death;
Though moulded of the valley clod,
Imperishable type of God?
Did I tell her—told she me,
Soon we twain must severed be;
That clay I am, and unto clay
She soon must leave me to decay,
And every thought, and word, and will
Holds me to Christ responsible?
Should I tremble at His warning
Me to meet Him in the morning?
Should I stand aghast with fright
If Messiah came to-night?
Or am I so at one with Him
That like the harps of seraphim,
In unison with cherubim,
No jarring note, nor untuned word,
Grates between me and my Lord?
Forgiving every wrong or slight,
Bequeathing all the world good night,
May I as calmly close mine eye
Whene'er I lay me down to die,
Assured that if my fleeting breath
Like a long sigh escape in death,
Whene'er the final call is given,
I shall wake a saint in heaven.

SNAP-DRAGON.

A CHRISTMAS INCIDENT.

PART II.

AHAT evening was the one fixed for the unfortunate snap-dragon, but it would have to be put off till the next, as the children were all going to the party, the invitations for which they had received during breakfast. Edward would have been glad to have buried the materials, as well as the remembrance, of the snap-dragon in the earth, but both were equally impossible—the former as Annie had taken possession of them, and would by no means consent to give them up, or forego any share of the amusement. Arrived at Mrs. Harris's, Edward partly forgot his troubles, for the gaiety, the music, and, above all, the acting charades (he being one of the actors), occupied his mind, and prevented it from dwelling on other subjects not quite so pleasant.

The room, festooned with evergreens, dotted about which were innumerable coloured lamps, was the admiration of everybody present, and truly it was a pretty sight to see the crowds of eager, pleasure-marked faces, as they fitted to and fro through the almost fairy-like room, to the sound of the most charming of music. The charades passed off beautifully, and when Edward made his appearance in one as "Old Father Christmas," with icicles sparkling all over him, and looking, indeed, a miserable frozen object, the delight of the audience knew no bounds, and the applause was so noisy that it was some minutes before he could commence his somewhat elaborate speech; at the end of which, however, and upon his consequent disappearance, he was unanimously re-demanded.

The speculations regarding the Christmas tree proved to be quite correct. It was a most splendid affair, blazing with the light of numerous Christmas candles, and almost touching the ceiling, though it did stand upon the floor; and then the beautiful things upon it! It certainly was a most wonderful tree.

But, like all things, whether good or bad, the party at last came to an end, much too quickly for the taste of the guests; and Edward, as he reached home, felt that it had been but a temporary respite from the care which hung upon him. The next day proved to be an unhappy one, for the man came to Mr. Graham to know if he had got Master Edward to tell the truth, and finding he had not done so, threatened to summons him unless he satisfied his claim. This Mr. Graham, believing the man to be in the wrong, refused to do; and when Edward heard this, and his father told him in all probability he would be called as a witness, as he had paid the disputed sum, his terror was extreme.

At last the hour for the snap-dragon arrived.

Everything happened beautifully for it. Mr. and Mrs. Graham had gone out to spend the evening, and the nurse had gone down-stairs to have a chat with her fellow-servants, leaving the children under Annie's care. The first difficulty was to find something to put the raisins in. For some time the perplexity was great, but suddenly Annie remembered a japanned tray in a cupboard just outside the room, and this accordingly they agreed to use. Then Edward put the raisins into the tray, and poured the brandy over, and then—the greatest triumph of all—lighted it. The flames danced merrily, and so did the little ones, and Annie found some difficulty in preventing them from making too much noise. The children were delighted, though once or twice they were very near crying when their fingers were nipped by the revengeful fire; yet, on the whole, it was a very successful affair; and Edward, in watching the little ones' pleasure, enjoyed himself more than he had supposed possible. Little Amy, the youngest, was especially gleeful, and more than once Annie only just succeeded in preventing her turning over the tray with its contents.

Suddenly, when the enjoyment and fun was at its height, a sound was heard of some one coming upstairs. In a moment, Annie blew out the lights, and making the children keep close round her, stood before the remains of the burning spirit. The alarm, however, was a false one, for the footsteps went past the door, and gradually died away. Annie went into the adjoining room to fetch a match, in order to relight the candles, but before she could get back again she heard a chorus of voices calling, "Annie! Annie!" and then followed such a clamour that Annie could not distinguish a word. Hastening into the nursery, she saw at a glance the catastrophe that had happened. Poor little Amy, too eager to wait for her sister's return, had endeavoured to reach the table on which was placed the tray, but being far too small, had not been able to get at the plums, but had upset some of the lighted brandy, which, falling on her dress, had set it on fire. The child was running wildly about the room, thereby spreading the flames with intense rapidity. The others, too frightened to know what they were about, upon Annie's entering clung about her, and thus prevented her from doing any good.

Annie, never noted for presence of mind, now lost all the little she had ever possessed, and seeing that little Amy was trying, according to her usual custom when frightened, to hide herself in her dress, she, frightened of being set on fire also, flung the child from her, and running across the room, pulled the bell violently. It was some moments before the servants arrived, and then they all came together, to

see what was the matter. Fortunately the cook, a kind, motherly woman, possessed more presence of mind than Annie, and she, in far quicker time than it takes to write it, wrapped the child up in the hearthrug, and soon succeeded in extinguishing the flames. Annie, meanwhile, had taken good care that the snap-dragon should be prevented from working further mischief, and also from telling tales against her and Edward, by pouring water upon the remains of it, and carefully hiding the tray.

Little Amy had been well cared for by the kind cook, who doctored her burns in a most skilful manner; nevertheless, the poor little thing moaned incessantly, and seemed in very great pain, and, indeed, she was very much burned.

Annie, fearful of experiencing her parents' anger, went to bed before they came home; and Edward was not seen by anybody for the rest of the evening.

The next morning inquiries were made of Annie as to the accident, but she had turned sullen, and nothing could be got out of her; and as for Edward, he had gone to bed the night before, but had got up long before any one else was stirring, and gone out, where, no one could tell, nor had he yet returned.

As the day passed on, and Edward did not make his appearance, Mrs. Graham began to feel very uneasy. The doctor had been to see Amy, and reported that she was progressing very favourably, so now Edward was the only anxiety. The evening came and went, and yet no Edward appeared, and with sorrowful hearts the family broke up, and though they retired to their rooms, it was not to sleep—at least, for some.

Edward, frightened, and feeling that the consequences of his fault clung to him like a shadow, and fearing further mischief, almost thinking that the misery that it had entailed seemed endless, and hating and despising himself, after passing a restless night, had got up and gone out, in order to calm his mind, if possible, by exertion of body. He walked a long way in the grey morning light, meeting nobody, till at last he came suddenly upon a little village, the clock of which told him it was nearly nine o'clock. The place was entirely strange to him, and he walked on, not wishing to accost any of the few people he saw, nor caring whither he went.

At last he turned back, but, to his dismay, he could not remember any of the turnings he had taken, his thoughts having been so preoccupied: and especially where several roads crossed was he perplexed. This immediate difficulty scared him more than the one he had been aimlessly flying from all day, and he felt like a vagabond on the face of the earth. He now determined to make a clean breast of it as soon as he got home, whenever that might be. He walked about till dark, when at last, to his great joy, he discovered a familiar landmark, and soon he was on his way homeward. Weary and footsore, he reached the house, only to find it shut up and dark. However, he knew every turn of the place, and after

some little trouble he succeeded in making an entry through the conservatory into the house. More like a thief than the master's eldest son, he crept up-stairs, and threw himself on his bed, and the next morning, to the astonishment and no little relief of his anxious parents, made a very shame-faced appearance at the breakfast table. Thus ended what had worn the aspect of a very serious adventure.

During the morning the servant entered the room where Mrs. Graham, with Annie and Edward, were sitting, bearing a tray in her hand, and going up to her mistress, exclaimed, "Look here, ma'am! I have missed this ever since Miss Amy got burnt, and I have just found it, hidden away behind ever such a lot of things in the nursery cupboard. 'Tis quite spoilt, burnt all over, all the paint off, and this plum sticking to the bottom of it. I can't think who's done it, ma'am."

Edward and Annie hung down their heads, and tried not to look conscious, but it was a decided failure.

"Do you know anything of this, Annie?"

"No—that is, I—" began Annie.

"Yes, mamma," said Edward, determined to bring the matter to an end, and not let it lead him into further temptation. "We wanted a snap-dragon, and we knew you and papa would not let us have it, so we had it up in the nursery, and that's how poor Amy got burnt." And Edward was obliged to speak hurriedly to prevent the tears from rising to his eyes—a weakness he would not have been thought guilty of for the world.

"Where did the money come from?" said Mrs. Graham, half guessing the truth.

"The skates, mamma," was all that he could say.

"Oh, Edward! I could not have believed it. What will your papa think of you?"

"Ah! what, indeed!" was Edward's thought, though he answered nothing.

When Mr. Graham heard of his son's conduct, he was extremely shocked, but the only remark he made to Edward was, "You must make full amends to the man, Edward." And this he put in his son's power to do, by advancing him the next month's allowance, making, for once, an exception to his rule, because Edward, in his contrition, promised to devote the whole of it to that purpose.

Annie, too, profiting by Edward's example, wished to help Edward in paying the sum, but this her brother would not allow; she went with him, however, to the man's house, and, surprised and shocked though she was to witness the poverty of the family, it was worth seeing how delighted the man was to find himself so unexpectedly cleared, and the loss made up to him and his starving family. Edward wondered how he could have remained with such a weight upon his mind, so happy did he feel now that it was removed; and never before had he so well understood the truth, "How great a matter a little fire kindleth."

L. M. C.